

Pregnancy Q&A and Pandemic H1N1 Influenza

What is the concern about the flu and pregnancy?

Pregnant women are more likely to get sick than others and have more serious problems with any flu due to metabolic changes going on in your body during the pregnancy. These problems include preterm labor and severe pneumonia. Pregnant women with existing medical problems such as asthma, hypertension, or diabetes are at higher risk for severe complications from the flu. Pregnant women are encouraged to get the influenza vaccine each flu season. When the vaccine for pandemic H1N1 influenza becomes available, all pregnant women and women planning on getting pregnant should get the H1N1 vaccine.

Symptoms of pandemic H1N1 influenza

- Fever/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Headache
- Body aches
- Vomiting and diarrhea may also be present

What should I do if I get sick?

- If you get sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home, limit contact with others. Take acetaminophen for fever, wash your hands often with soap and water, and cover your mouth when you cough.
- Call your doctor within two days if you have mild symptoms of the flu. Call your doctor immediately if you have a high fever, productive cough, and shortness of breath, pain or pressure in your chest or abdomen, decreased or no movement from the baby. Your doctor may do a nasal swab to test for the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus. Your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine that will fight against the flu and make your symptoms milder. If you do not have a doctor and you are pregnant, go to the emergency department or immediate care clinic. If you cannot afford to pay for the medicines the doctor prescribes for you, tell the doctor. He may be able to give you free samples.
- Drink extra fluids to replace what you will lose from coughing, fever, and runny nose. Pregnant women are at risk of becoming dehydrated with the flu and dehydration can cause preterm labor.
- If you live alone and are sick, call someone and ask them to check on you every day to make sure you have what you need and that you are not getting seriously ill.

How can I protect myself from getting the flu?

- If there is pandemic H1N1 influenza virus in your community, avoid crowded places. Stock up on household and health supplies such as water, acetaminophen, and food.


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- If someone in your home has the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus, let your doctor know and take precautions. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water; do not share cups, food, or eating utensils with the sick person. The flu is passed through droplets from the mouth. Make sure the sick person covers their mouth when they cough and immediately dispose of soiled tissues.

Is it ok to breastfeed my baby if I am sick?

The best thing you can do to protect your baby from the pandemic H1N1 influenza is to start or continue to breastfeed. Breastmilk has antibodies in it that help the baby fight diseases. This is important because the baby's immune system is still developing. If you are ill when you deliver the baby, begin breastfeeding immediately. Even before your milk comes in, you will be giving your baby important antibodies.

Breastfeeding your baby when you have the flu

- Do not stop breastfeeding if you are ill. The CDC recommends: "If a woman is ill, she should continue breastfeeding and increase feeding frequency." Increased feeding is recommended for the baby to get more antibodies from mother's milk.
- Be careful not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face. Wear a face mask if needed.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Wash your hands before and after touching the baby. Wash the baby's hands if they have been in its mouth prior to breastfeeding.
- Limit sharing of toys and other items that have been in baby's mouth with other infants or children. Wash thoroughly with soap and water any items that have been in the baby's mouth.
- Keep pacifiers (including the pacifier ring/handle) and other items out of adults' or other children's mouths prior to giving to the infant.
- If you are too sick to breastfeed, pump your breasts and store the breastmilk in the refrigerator or freezer and have someone else feed your baby with the pumped milk.
- If the baby is too ill to breastfeed, pump breast milk and store safely. Feed by bottle often.
- Call the baby's doctor and let him know you have the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus. The doctor may want to see the baby or will give you medical advice about how to keep your baby safe.
- You can continue to breastfeed while you are taking flu medicines from your doctor. Do not use over-the-counter medicines, except acetaminophen, without asking the doctor first.
- The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend "Keep infants and mothers as close together as possible and encourage early and frequent skin-to-skin contact between mothers and their infants." This promotes early and frequent breastfeeding. However, do not let the infant sleep in the same bed with you or anyone else. The infant should sleep in a bassinet or crib next to your bed for safety.

If you need help finding a doctor for your pregnancy or your baby, call the Indiana Family Helpline at 1-800-433-0746 for assistance.

For information about the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus go to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at: cdcinfo@cdc.gov



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